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As I have been attempting to draw a hasty sketch of national manners, I shall add another trait in which I think the English have the advantage over my countrymen, in not indulging so freely in the excesses of the table after dinner. In general they are more sober. A literary or moral subject is seldom introduced into conversation after dinner in Ireland, yet it is common in England; where if they have less conviviality, and what is erroneously called good fellowship, they have more rationality and literary taste, as I have experienced on many occasions during my occasional visits to that country. To this cause I attribute the greater degree of intellectual improvement, manifested among many of the mercantile class in England. Some of them are very deeply engaged in business; and yet they find time for literary pursuits. The time gained from undue indulgences of the table is given to reading and other means of improvement without encroaching on business. This is a more rational entertainment than the noisy contests of politics, and the news of the day, or talk of the technical routine of trade generally occupying that portion of the conversation which is spared in many convivial companies from dogs and horses, where the language and manners of jockeys and grooms are well imitated. Noisy companies are too common in all countries, but I am inclined to think that on settling the account, the balance in favour of sobriety and rationality lies with our neighbours, and that our manners would be improved in an imitation of their more prudent plan.

K.

*To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.*

ON SONG WRITING.

STR,  
CHANCE, accident, design, or idleness, or what you will, threw a very large collection of old and new Songs in my way, and I read them over, with no immediate view of improvement you may suppose, but rather to divert an idle hour, as harmlessly as possible. It occurred to me however, that if I could extract any remarks from those songs, and arrange them

methodically, my time would not be totally wasted. As I know not yet in what particular method I may arrange them, the present letter can only contain a few general observations on such as happened particularly to occur to my memory; but if I have leisure to pursue this subject, I promise you something like method in my handling the theory and practice of song-writing. In love songs, which I shall consider first, seems to be an established rule with it the writers of them to steer as clear as possible from common sense, indeed there is but little room for this property in the brains of a love sick Poet. He takes leave of the present world and flies to the regions of fancy, where he seeks no other guide, and wishes for no other resting place than Rhyme. Confident that the music master will hide all his failings and cover all his defects with quavers and crotchets, he violates every rule of propriety, every law of providence, and distorts every image of nature. He walks upon stilts, and although perhaps no methodist talks more familiarly of heaven and hell, complains heavily of suffering the torments of the latter, and is ever, but in vain, by his own account, soliciting the blessedness of the former.

The language of love songs is profusely metaphorical; the mistress is generally a monstrous human being, armed with darts, flames and tormenting engines, and the aim of the Poet is, to disarm her of those deadly weapons. The following is a small specimen of the true metaphorical:

“With her I could for ever dwell,  
There’s *hæven* within her arms;  
But absent from her I’m in *hell*,  
Dire grief my soul alarms:  
I rave, I burn, I pine, I die,  
Nought can my heart relieve,  
But at her sight my sorrows fly,  
Her presence bids me live.”

The distress of a man is certainly remarkable, who at one and the same time raves, burns, pines, and dies; it is also to be noticed that there is one circumstance in his case still more deplorable. The poor gentleman is in hell, a very unpleasant situation; where however I must leave him to take notice of a lover of another

kind, who has thought proper, I will not say, to invert the whole course of nature, but at least to stop its progress, to keep the birds from flying, and even prevent the blowing of the winds:

"Thus she mourn'd, what a scene all around,

The birds flag their wings at her sighs ;  
The vallies her sorrows resound,

And the stream shows her blubbered eyes ;

All nature takes part in her woe,

A black cloud o'er the heavens is spread,

The winds have forgotten to blow,

And the willows bend over her head."

What is an Earthquake to this? that the winds should lose their memory and forget to blow; yet such liberties are frequently taken by Poets, but, in my opinion, they are very *unwarrantable*, for nothing can be so cruel as to annihilate the world for the sake of one inhabitant of it. I would allow the Poets to hold conversation with the woods and valleys, and to call the streams or beasts of the field to witness, but to prevent the poor birds from flying, and the winds from blowing, is not to be justified by any of the laws of Parnassus.

It appears too, that the language of lovers, when they speak of heaven and hell, is not always metaphorical, witness the following:

"Nice virtue preach'd religions laws,

Paths to eternal rest,

To fight his king and country's cause,

Fame counsel'd him was best,

But love opposed their noisy tongues,

And thus their votes out-braved :

Get, get, a mistress, fair and young,

Love fiercely, constantly, and long,

And then thou shalt be sav'd.

Here is a receipt for eternal salvation; for this song is modestly entitled "the way to be saved," and no doubt there are many who tried the experiment; with what success I cannot at present take time to inquire. This author, however, differs very materially in his religious sentiments from the following:

"Long courtship's the vice of a phlegmatic fool,

Like the grace of fanatical sinners,

Where the stomachs are lost and the vic-  
tuals grow cool,

Before mens sit down to their dinners."

The poet's idea seems to be less unreasonable than any I have mentioned, for he considers his mistress in the same light as he considers a joint smoaking on the table. He rejects courtship because it resembles a long grace before dinner; so whips up his knife and fork, and helps himself like an alderman at a city feast. Indeed the song smacks so strongly of the *kitchen*, that I should almost suspect a member of the cook's company had written it. It was a very great favourite some time back, and the ladies must certainly own their obligations to the author for the delicate comparison he has drawn.

In my next letter, Mr. Editor, I shall probably pursue the subject, and if I find it agreeable to your readers, shall go through a course of lectures on most of our common and fashionable songs, with a view to ascertain the portion each has of poetry and common sense. Mean time, I am, Sir, your very obedient servant.

CURSORIUS.

Belfast, February, 1809.

To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.

SIR,  
IN the present situation of this country, from the exorbitant price of Flax, and the probable want of a sufficient quantity of Flax-seed for the ensuing season, every circumstance connected with the linen-manufacture, and the support of those employed in its various branches, is worthy of serious consideration. Should it fail from want of raw material, the spinners must suffer first; but the distress, if not ruin, of others must soon follow. In the counties of Down and Antrim, notwithstanding the extent of their manufacture, the dearth of flax, or of flax-seed, is only a lesser evil, compared with that which must be felt in the other parts of the kingdom. From the fineness of their yarn, a small quantity of flax employs a great number of spinners, and produces a profit, as the price of labour, equally great.